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ABSTRACT

A study focused on the relative effect of various stress factors on: (1) regular and special education teachers; (2) teachers in resource and self-contained classrooms; and (3) teachers in programs for learning disabled, emotionally handicapped, and mentally handicapped students. Data were gathered with a questionnaire that was completed by 273 Arizona educators. Respondents indicated their level of agreement with the suggestion that each of a list of 53 factors had been stress producing for them in the previous 12 months. Stress factors included on the questionnaire were based on a review of the literature and interviews with special educators. The mean for each item was used to rank the items for each of the groups studied. "Paperwork," "procedural red tape," "discipline and behavior problems," and "disinterested parents" were found to be high stress producers for all groups studied. Comparison of groups of educators resulted in the identification of one or more factors that are significantly more stressful for those in specific types of positions than for those in other positions. Significant differences were also found between levels of stress produced by some factors for special education teachers in resource and self-contained classrooms. Five tables are appended. (JMK)

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Stress Producing Factors Among Regular Educators and Various Types of Special Educators

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Stress Producing Factors Among Regular Educators and Various Types of Special Educators

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Job related stress is a major problem faced by many helping professionals such as teachers in regular and special education programs. Pagel and Price (1980) report that prolonged job stress has been found to be related to: (a) a negative change in work-related attitudes and behavior; (b) a decrease in the quality of help professionals normally offer; and (c) an adverse effect on the emotional comfort of clients. They point out that the mental and physical health of staff members may also suffer.

A number of stress producing factors that lead to burnout among regular educators have been identified by researchers. Included among these factors are verbal abuse by students and parents (Bardo, 1979); inadequate salaries (Needle, Griffin, Svendsen and Berney, 1980); excessive clerical work (Lortie, 1975; McLaughlin and Shea, 1960); supervisory duties (Kyriacon and Sutcliffe, 1977); large class size (Rudd and Wiseman, 1962) and difficulty in dealing with administrators (Bardo, 1979).

Studies of stress factors that lead to burnout in special education teachers identified the following factors: disruptive student behavior (Dunham, 1981); compliance with PL 94-142, preparing IEPs and maintaining data for each student (Bensky, Shaw, Gouse, Bates, Dixon and Beane, 1980); and interpersonal problems between regular classroom teachers, special educators and administrators (D'Alonzo and Wiseman, 1980; Morsink, Blackhurst, and Williams, 1979). Excessive paperwork, inadequate salary, discipline of students, inadequate planning time, student

attitude and pupil-teacher ratio were reported by Olson and Matuskey (1982) to be the six most stressful factors reported by teachers of learning disabled students.

The relative effect of various stress producing factors in regular and special education classrooms and in various types of special education teaching assignments is not well documented. This study focuses on the relative effect of various stress factors on:

1. regular and special education teachers
2. teachers in resource and self-contained special classrooms
3. teachers in programs for learning disabled, emotionally handicapped and mentally handicapped students

Method

The data were gathered with a questionnaire that was completed by 273 Arizona educators. The respondents indicated their level of agreement with the suggestion that each of a list of 53 factors had been stress producing for them during the previous 12 months. The five choices were, "strongly agree," "agree," "no opinion," "disagree," and "strongly disgree." The stress factors included on the questionnaire were based on a review of literature and interviews with regular and special educators. The mean for each item was used to rank the items for each of the groups studied. A one-way ANOVA was used to determine the significance of the differences in the means for the groups being compared for each of the stress factors studied.

Findings

The means for special educators for "IEP conferences," "lack of breaks and preparation time," and "lack of time to communicate with colleagues," indicated that these factors were significantly more stressful for special education teachers than for regular classroom teachers. The 15 most stressful factors for special education teachers and the corresponding rank of these factors by regular educators is shown in Table I.

"Paperwork" and "discipline and behavior problems" were found to be the most stress producing and second most stress producing factors for both groups. The means for special educators on 14 of the 15 stress factors were higher than for the regular educators.

Teachers in self-contained special classrooms had means for "discipline and behavior problems," "playground and lunch duty," "hostile and aggressive students," "feelings of personal and professional isolation," and "fear that federal funding would be lost," that were significantly higher than were the means for resource teachers (See Table II). Resource teachers had means that approached the .05 level of significance over self-contained classroom teachers for stress due to "procedural red tape," "lack of breaks and preparation time," and "IEP conferences."

Significant differences were found between teachers of the learning disabled and mentally handicapped on two of the 15 most stressful factors. The teachers of the learning disabled found "scheduling problems" to be

significantly more stressful than the teachers of the mentally handicapped who reported of "IEP conferences" were significantly more stressful (See Table III).

The stress levels reported by teachers of emotionally handicapped students were significantly higher than those reported by teachers of the learning disabled in three areas - "discipline and behavior problems," dealing with "hostile-aggressive students, " and with "hostile-aggressive parents" (See Table IV). Teachers of the learning disabled found dealing with "Procedural red tape" to be significantly more stressful than did teachers of the emotionally handicapped.

Factors that were sidnificantly more stress producing for teachers of emotionally handicapped students than for teachers of the mentally handicapped included dealing with "hostile-aggressive students," "feelings of personal and professional isolation," "lack of respect from students," and "lack of materials and equipment" (See Table V). "Procedural red tape" and "IEP conferences" were significantly more stressful for teachers of the mentally handicapped than for teachers of the emotionally handicapped.

Factors such as "preparation" for class," "delivery of instruction," "competition with colleagues," "interpersonal problems with other teachers and administrators," and "overcrowded classrooms" were not viewed by any of the groups fo be stressful enough to be ranked among the 15 most stressful factors. These factors were characterized by means of less than 3.0 on the five point scale.

Conclusions

"Paperwork," "procedural red tape," "discipline and behavior problems," and "disinterested parents" were found to be high stress producers for all of the groups studied. This finding suggests that a common set of factors serve as the basis of much of the stress experienced by educators. The inclusion of "paperwork" and "discipline and behavior problems" in this group supports the findings of Olson and Matuskey (1982) and Dunham (1981).

Comparison of groups of educators resulted in the identification of one or more factors that are significantly more stressful for those in specific types of positions than for those in other positions: For example, "IEP conferences," "lack of breaks and preparation time" and "lack of time to communicate with colleagues" were found to be significantly more stressful for special education teachers than for regular classroom teachers. The finding that IEP conferences and lack of breaks and preparation time are high stress producers for special educators supports Bensky, et al (1980) and Olson and Matuskey's 1982 findings.

Significant differences were found between the levels of stress produced by some factors for special education teachers in resource and self-contained classrooms. This finding suggests that the level of stress produced by some factors is assignment specific.

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Table I

Ranks of Stress Factors by Type of Teaching Assignment

Spec. Ed.		Reg. Ed.			
Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Sig. dif.	Stress factor
1	4.19	1	3.86	N.S.	Paperwork
2	4.09	2	3.86	N.S.	Discipline/behavior problems
3	3.96	4	3.63	N.S.	Procedural red tape
4	3.89	3	3.70	N.S.	Disinterested parents
5	3.68	9	3.37	N.S.	Fatigue
6	3.66	29	2.92	.05	IEP conferences
7	3.59	8	3.42	N.S.	Time required for further academic preparation
8	3.46	25	3.06	N.S.	Lack of rewards for work done
9	3.40	18	3.13	.05	Lack of breaks and preparation time
10	3.39	33	2.86	.05	Lack of time to communicate with colleagues
11	3.38	20	3.10	N.S.	Scheduling problems
12	3.35	16	3.16	N.S.	Lack of time for professional reading
13	3.34	17	3.13	N.S.	Hostile, aggressive students
14	3.33	6	3.44	N.S.	Playground and lunch duty
15	3.31	27	2.96	N.S.	Pressures from district hierarchy

5.0 = strongly agree

4.0 = agree

3.0 = no opinion

2.0 = disagree

1.0 = strongly disagree

Table II

Ranks of Stress Factors by Type of Special Classroom

Self Contained		Resource Room			
Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Sig. dif.	Stress Factors
1	4.34	3	3.92	.05	Discipline/behavior problems
2	4.09	1	4.16	N.S.	Paperwork
3	3.83	4	3.83	N.S.	Disinterested parents
4	3.79	2	4.05	.1	Procedural red tape
5	3.7	8	3.36	N.S.	Fatigue
6	3.51	25	3.01	.05	Playground and lunch duty
7	3.48	18	3.10	.08	Lack of breaks and preparation time
8	3.47	19	3.08	.05	Hostile/aggressive students
9	3.46	5	3.78	.09	IEP conferences
10	3.45	7	3.64	N.S.	Time required for further academic preparation
11	3.4	9	3.48	N.S.	Lack of rewards for work done
12	3.37	29	2.96	.05	Feeling of professional and personal isolation
13	3.35	31	2.94	.05	Loss of Federal funds
14	3.33	12	3.32	N.S.	Lack of time to communicate with colleagues
15	3.31	10	3.41	N.S.	Lack of time for professional reading

Table III

Ranks of Stress Factors by Category (LD/MH)

Learning Disabled		Mentally Handicapped			
Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Sig. dif.	Stress Factors
1	4.1	2	4.29	N.S.	Procedural red tape
2	4.0	1	4.5	N.S.	Paperwork
3	3.9	4	4.07	N.S.	Discipline/behavior problems
4	3.82	6	3.8	N.S.	Fatigue
5	3.72	5	3.81	N.S.	Disinterested parents
6	3.65	23	3.14	.05	Scheduling problems
7	3.65	12	3.4	N.S.	Lack of breaks and preparation time
8	3.53	11	3.42	N.S.	Time required for further acadmeic preparation
9	3.46	3	4.22	.05	IEP conferences
10	3.44	7	3.59	N.S.	Pressures from district hierarchy
11	3.4	18	3.28	N.S.	Lack of time for professional reading
12	3.39	13	3.4	N.S.	Lack of time to communicate with colleagues
13	3.37	16	3.29	N.S.	Preparation for classes
14	3.2	17	3.28	N.S.	Lack of rewards for work done
15	3.2	10	3.44	N.S.	Playground and lunch duty

Table IV

Ranks of Stress Factors by Category (EH/LD)

Emotionally Handicapped		Learning Disabled			
Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Sig. dif.	Stress Factors
1	4.50	3	3.9	.05	Discipline/behavior problems
2	4.06	2	4.0	N.S.	Paperwork
3	3.96	32	2.82	.05	Hostile/aggressive students
4	3.93	5	3.72	N.S.	Disinterested parents
5	3.56	4	3.82	N.S.	Fatigue
6	3.53	1	4.1	.05	Procedural red tape
7	3.50	38	2.68	.05	Hostile/aggressive parents
8	3.44	33	2.62	N.S.	Feeling of personal and professional isolation
9	3.41	9	3.46	N.S.	IEP
10	3.40	14	3.2	N.S.	Lack of reward for work done
11	3.40	7	3.65	N.S.	Lack of breaks and prep time
12	3.36	11	3.4	N.S.	Lack of time for professional reading
13	3.36	8	3.53	N.S.	Time required for further academic preparations
14	3.34	36	2.72	N.S.	Lack of respect from students
15	3.33	19	3.10	N.S.	Lack of materials and equipment

Table V

Ranks of Stress Factors by Category (EH/MH)

Emotionally Handicapped		Mentally Handicapped			
Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Sig. dif.	Stress Factors
1	4.50	4	4.07	N.S.	Discipline/behavior problems
2	4.06	1	4.5	N.S.	Paperwork
3	3.96	19	3.26	.05	Hostile/aggressive students
4	3.93	5	3.81	N.S.	Disinterested parents
5	3.56	6	3.8	N.S.	Fatigue
6	3.53	2	4.29	.05	Procedural red tape
7	3.50	28	2.96	N.S.	Hostile/aggressive parents
8	3.44	42	2.69	.05	Feeling of professional and personal isolation
9	3.41	3	4.22	.05	IEP conference
10	3.40	14	3.28	N.S.	Lack of reward for work done
11	3.40	12	3.4	N.S.	Lack of breaks and prep time
12	3.36	11	3.28	N.S.	Lack of time for professional reading
13	3.36	11	3.42	N.S.	Time required for further academic preparation
14	3.34	46	2.57	.05	Lack of respect from students
15	3.33	29	2.97	.05	Lack of materials and equipment